

Buried deep in the largest domestic spending bill of the year is money for a library and museum honoring first ladies. The \$130,000 was requested by the local congressman, Representative Ralph Regula, Republican of Ohio. The library was founded by his wife, Mary A. Regula. The director of the librar...

Buried deep in the largest domestic spending bill of the year is money for a library and museum honoring first ladies. The \$130,000 was requested by the local congressman, Representative Ralph Regula, Republican of Ohio. The library was founded by his wife, Mary A. Regula. The director of the library is his daughter, Martha A. Regula.

Money for Pet Projects Other "namesake projects" in the bill include the Charles B. Rangel Center for Public Service at City College of New York, named for the chairman of the House Ways and Means Committee; the Thad Cochran Research Center at the University of Mississippi, named for the senior Republican on the Senate Appropriations Committee; and the Thomas Daschle Center for Public Service at South Dakota State University, honoring the former Senate Democratic leader.

The bill also includes "Harkin grants" to build schools and promote healthy lifestyles in Iowa, where Senator Tom Harkin, a Democrat, is running for re-election.

Namesake projects are not new, but the appetite for such earmarks appears to be undiminished. The items illustrate the way in which lawmakers funnel federal money to projects in their home states, despite promises to rein in the practice. House and Senate negotiators last week approved a modest reduction in pet projects for health care, education and other domestic programs. But more than 2,200 hospitals and clinics, schools and colleges, museums and social service agencies get money for specific projects, including health information technology, teacher training and the promotion of sexual abstinence. Rather than making hard choices, negotiators accepted almost all the earmarks recommended by either chamber.

Senators John McCain of Arizona and Tom Coburn of Oklahoma, both Republicans, cited the first ladies library as one of the more egregious. Mr. McCain said it illustrated the "many wasteful items tucked away in this bill."

But Mr. Regula, the dean of the Ohio delegation, with 35 years in Congress, said the library “tells the story of first ladies and the contributions they have made to the nation.” More generally, he said, “I don’t have one earmark in any bill that I am not prepared to go to the mat on and defend to the taxpayer.”

A few lawmakers, like the House Republican leader, John A. Boehner of Ohio, do not seek earmarks. And a few junior members want to ban them next year. But many more lawmakers still see them as a way to deliver service to constituents. Invariably, these lawmakers say, they know the needs of their districts better than bureaucrats in Washington.

“Earmarks are not an abuse,” Mr. Regula said, unless they are part of a quid pro quo.

The earmarks account for more than \$1 billion in a bill providing \$150.7 billion for the Departments of Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education. Congress sent the bill last week to President Bush, who has said he would veto it.

Congress did not systematically tally or disclose such figures in the past. But Ryan Alexander, president of Taxpayers for Common Sense, a budget watchdog group, said the total had come down from 2005, when the comparable bill included 3,000 earmarks worth \$1.3 billion.

The first ladies library is named for Mr. Regula’s wife, but other projects are named for the lawmakers themselves.

Mr. Rangel, a New York Democrat, obtained \$2 million to establish the public service center that is named for him and that will “prepare individuals for careers in public service.” A college spokesman said the center would include an office for Mr. Rangel and a library for his papers

and memorabilia.

Representative John Campbell, Republican of California, said Mr. Rangel should be ashamed of using tax dollars to build “a monument to himself.”

But Mr. Rangel, who took office in 1971, brushed aside the criticism. “I would have a problem if you did it,” he told Mr. Campbell, “because I don’t think that you’ve been around long enough to inspire a building like this.”

Four Democratic senators won the earmark providing \$1 million for the Daschle Center for Public Service and Representative Democracy. The center will house the papers of Mr. Daschle, who lost a bid for re-election in 2004.

Mr. Harkin secured \$5 million for “Harkin school grants” and \$1.5 million for “Harkin wellness grants.”

The newest member of Congress, Representative Niki Tsongas, a Democrat, took the oath of office on Oct. 18, but has already won an earmark, to provide \$240,000 for a community health center in her hometown, Lowell, Mass.

Senator Arlen Specter, Republican of Pennsylvania, secured 25 earmarks providing \$882,000 for abstinence education programs around the state.

"There are people who say that abstinence education doesn't work," Mr. Specter said, but "I've seen a lot of indicators that it does work." In addition, he said, "I have 12 million people in Pennsylvania, they have a lot of different ideas," some of them strongly favor abstinence education, and their values "ought to be recognized."

Money for Pet Projects Representative Sam Farr, Democrat of California, obtained \$100,000 for O'Neill Sea Odyssey, a science education program that takes children sailing on a catamaran in Monterey Bay. The program was established by Jack O'Neill, a wealthy manufacturer of surfing wet suits, and Mr. Farr was until recently a member of its advisory board.

Some lawmakers who voted against the bill still got earmarks. The House Republican whip, Roy Blunt of Missouri, said he voted against "this bloated bill" because Congress must "stand up against overspending" if it hopes to regain the trust of the American people.

But the bill includes \$1.4 million requested by Mr. Blunt for five education and social welfare projects in his southwest Missouri district.

Representative Jeb Hensarling, Republican of Texas, said, "Among House Republicans, there is a strong sentiment that the earmark process is broken, though people differ on what repairs are needed."

"Earmarks may be a small part of the total budget, but they are a huge part of the culture of spending," Mr. Hensarling said in an interview. "They teach people to be dependent on the federal government."

Representative Nathan Deal, Republican of Georgia, secured a \$350,000 earmark for a study of the relationship between "floor coverings" and indoor air quality. Mr. Deal represents Dalton, Ga., which calls itself the carpet capital of the world. Carpet makers have been concerned about

suggestions that carpets harbor dust and pollen that could contribute to asthma.

The bill also includes \$150,000 for the American Ballet Theater. Representative Carolyn B. Maloney, Democrat of New York, who requested the money, said it would allow the dance company to take its "world-class ballet and education" programs to schoolchildren around the country.

But Representative Jeff Flake, Republican of Arizona, said he did not see why the federal government should subsidize a dance company with millions of dollars in assets.

"We could be facing the music if taxpayers learn that we are dancing away with their hard-earned money here," Mr. Flake said.